



2016 Annual Legislative Report

Indiana Legislative Youth Advisory Council

Established by HEA 1162-2008, the Indiana Legislative Youth Advisory Council (Council) is responsible for submitting at least one annual report to the Indiana General Assembly on issues pertaining to youth and young adults across the state. The Council was originally overseen by the Indiana Department of Education. However, as of 2010, the Indiana Bar Foundation oversees the activity of the Council.

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Letter from The Council Leadership

Respected Members of the Indiana General Assembly,

First and foremost, we, the Indiana Legislative Youth Advisory Council (Council), would like to offer our sincere gratitude for spending some of your valuable time reviewing the Council's Annual Legislative Report, and for your support of our endeavors throughout the year. The purpose of this nonpartisan Council is to serve as the voice of all Hoosier youth and to provide you with this report, in which we offer you recommendations and policies that young Hoosiers find personally and substantively significant.

This Council believes deeply in the importance of the work that we do in giving young Hoosiers, some of whom may not yet be of voting age, a political voice. In helping Hoosier youth become invested in the legislative process, we hope to inspire a generation of young voters to become civically engaged and passionate about their ability to enact change via the legislative process.

The Indiana Legislative Youth Advisory Council is comprised of driven, passionate young Hoosiers who work together regardless of political affiliation or ideology, to educate themselves and their fellow Hoosier youth on important contemporary issues. To spend the past year as the leader of such a group has been the utmost honor. I truly believe that this Council has the potential to enact real and lasting change to the State of Indiana. For this reason, I am incredibly proud to present this report to you, which may well be the beginning of change in Indiana.

Finally, we as a Council hope that through this report, you gain valuable insight into the current passions and concerns of Indiana's youth. We look forward to maintaining a relationship of cooperation in order to better not only the lives of Hoosier youth, but the lives of all Hoosiers across this great state.

Cordially,

Katherine E. Carlton

Katherine E. Carlton,
Chair, Indiana Legislative Youth Advisory Council

Official Membership Listing

Officers

Katherine Carlton, Chair
of Westfield, Indiana

William Hart, Vice Chair
of Terre Haute, Indiana

Austin Theisz, Secretary
of Terre Haute, Indiana

Joshua Waddell, Legislative Liaison
of Jeffersonville, Indiana

Ryley Ruminksi, Press Secretary
of LaPorte, Indiana

Membership

Megan Stoner
of Elwood, Indiana

Erin Alberda
of Fishers, Indiana

Tyler Reifsteck
of Evansville, Indiana

Zander Barr
of LaPorte, Indiana

Council Advisor

Collin Gruver, Director of Civic Education Programs (Indiana Bar Foundation)
of Indianapolis, Indiana

A Recommendation for the Reform of School Mental Health Services

Issue:

According to a report from the Surgeon General, roughly 20 percent of children and adolescents display symptoms of mental health difficulty each year.¹ Five percent of students show symptoms of extreme functional impairment and one in five students has a diagnosable mental, social, or behavioral disorder, but as little as one sixth of students actually get the services they need.² Undiagnosed and untreated disorders contribute to poor academic performance difficulty building friendships, lower self-esteem, and social isolation for the student.³ These disorders can cause disruptions in the classroom, which adversely impacts the education of every student present. Students with these disorders have higher suspension and lower graduation rates than their peers who do not have mental, social, or behavioral disorders.⁴ Addressing students' mental health is essential not only their academic performance, but all aspects of their lives.

¹ Macklem, G. L. (2011). *Evidence-Based School Mental Health Services: Affect Education, Emotion Regulation, Training, and Cognitive Behavioral Therapy*. New York: Springer.

² *Id.*

³ *Id.*

⁴ Witte, R. H., & Mosley-Howard, G. Susan. (2014). *Mental Health Practice in Today's Schools: Issues and Interventions*. New York, NY: Springer Publishing Company.

Recommendation:

The Council recommends that all public school districts in Indiana be equipped with a mental health professional who is able to treat, diagnose, and assist students with the aforementioned disorders as necessary to ensure a productive and positive learning environment for the entire school. If students with disorders receive a diagnosis early in their educations, they have a better chance to excel because treatment will allow for a greater chance at academic and social success.⁵

To this end, the Council recommends the use of a program referred to as Response to Intervention (RTI). This is a multi-level, district-wide system used for identifying and addressing problematic disorders early in students' academic career. The RTI process includes quality education, universal screening for such disorders, and the use of Positive Behavioral Supports for students who have been diagnosed with a mental health disorder. The core of the RTI approach includes effective intervention strategies, monitoring students' individual progress, and the use of data-based decision-making, which includes utilizing ongoing objective data taken into account when decisions about the education or treatment of the student are being made.⁶

In order to maximize the positive impact of the mental health professionals placed in Indiana schools, the relationship between teachers and these mental health professionals resemble coaching as opposed to collaboration; the coach engages consultees in problem solving, observes their implementation efforts, and provides performance feedback. Coaching is

⁵ Macklem.

⁶ Witte.

effective because it increases the knowledge that teachers have of their students' mental health issues, and it strengthens the skills of both teachers and mental health professionals.⁷

For these reasons, the Council recommends the implementation of mental health professionals using RTI alongside the process of better training teachers in regards to mental health in each Indiana public school.

⁷ *Id.*

A Recommendation for Implementing Satellite Deaf Schools

Issue:

Indiana has only one school for deaf students that is located in Indianapolis. The issue is that every deaf student who resides in Indiana must go to the Indiana School for the Deaf, which leaves at a disadvantage deaf students who do not live near this school; they are therefore forced to reside on the academic campus.⁸ As a result, they are forced to leave their homes and families if they want to receive services. There are about 2,116 children who are deaf in Indiana.⁹ Sadly, this only furthers their disadvantage by distancing them from their families.

This Council has interacted with a family who was affected by this dynamic. The family lived two and half hours away from the Indiana School for the Deaf, and had to make the difficult choice regarding whether they should send their child so far away to live at a young age. Ultimately, the child stayed home to be with the family, which was a hard decision, because they knew that his education would not on par to that offered at the Deaf School. After countless meetings with special education administrators, the parents were so disappointed with his quality of education, that he began home-schooling at the age of nine. Furthermore, extracurricular activities were not readily available for him to experience, like they are for

⁸ *Operational Review*, Indiana School for the Deaf, (December 2011)

[http://www.in.gov/omb/files/ISD_Operational_Review_\(December_2011\).pdf](http://www.in.gov/omb/files/ISD_Operational_Review_(December_2011).pdf).

⁹ *Indiana Deaf and Hard of Hearing children*,

https://www.in.gov/isdh/files/Indiana_Deaf_and_Hard_of_Hearing_Children.pdf.

students at the Indiana School for the Deaf.¹⁰ There simply are not any successful programs for deaf students unless they are sent to Indianapolis away from family and friends.

Recommendation:

The Council recommends a revision to the current school situation for the deaf by adding two satellite schools: one in the Northern region of Indiana and one in the Southern region of Indiana. This proposal will allow closer proximity for deaf students that reside in the Southern and Northern regions of Indiana, thus giving them a chance to be a day-student. Additionally, it would enable them to come home after school to be with their families, like most hearing students in Indiana.

¹⁰ Indiana School for the Deaf, <http://www.deafhoosiers.com/>.

A Recommendation for Reforming School Discipline

Issue:

When students are punished by losing time in the classroom, there are ramifications that are not immediately visible. Suspension and expulsion affect different demographic groups in disparate ways. Where people of color, students from low-income families, and the disabled are disproportionately disciplined using expulsion and suspension, the methodology and merits of expulsion and suspension must be reevaluated.¹¹ It is important to realize the social and academic implications of expulsion and suspension. These groups have much to gain from education, but unfortunately, they are removed from the classroom at higher rates than other students. It logically follows that removing such students from class might diminish educational gains that they could have achieved, further adding to their disadvantages. These students often go directly from educational institutions to the criminal justice system via suspension, expulsion, or the result of an arrest in school.¹²

Recommendation:

The Council recommends a policy that aims to reform disciplinary action in the education system. This includes reforming how schools report their use of disciplinary action and administering a system that holds schools accountable for how they assign punishments. One possible way that schools might do so is by further implementing the use of In-School Suspension. In School Suspension is a punishment wherein students are punished by doing all

¹¹ U.S. Department of Education (Office for Civil Rights).

<http://www2.ed.gov/about/offices/list/ocr/know.html?src=ft>. Dept. of Ed., Mar. 2014. Web. 16 Nov. 2014.

¹² Heitzeg, N. A. (2016). *The school-to-prison pipeline: education, discipline, and racialized double standards*. Santa Barbara, California: Praeger, an imprint of ABC-CLIO, LLC.

of their work alone in a room with a teacher. They lose the social aspect of school for the duration of the punishment, but do not lose educational time.

This might also include funding for state-level programs that instruct educators on the merits of restorative justice—a form of discipline that focuses on the perpetrator fixing the problem they caused, getting to the underlying factors that caused the delinquent behavior, and building positive social skills of the wrongdoer.¹³ Restorative justice views misconduct as not simply a violation of school policy but instead a violation of the school community that must be explored and repaired, thereby allowing for participatory and democratic punishment and problem-solving, which enables the student to be heard and supported.¹⁴

Additionally, the Council recommends that Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports (PBIS) be integrated more widely into schools. PBIS is not a program to be implemented, but rather a framework through which to approach students. An example of PBIS at work would be a teacher observing a student's behavior and helping the student develop a multi-component plan to stop the misbehavior. PBIS is a way for teachers to maintain their classrooms by acknowledging and working to change misbehavior without removing the student from the learning environment.¹⁵ This alternative to suspension and expulsion is also federally endorsed.

¹³ Ashley, Jessica and Kimberly Burke, *Implementing Restorative Justice*, Illinois Criminal Justice Information Agency, <http://www.icjia.state.il.us/assets/pdf/BARI/SCHOOL%20BARI%20GUIDEB000K.pdf>, U.S. Dept. of Justice, n.d. Web. 16 Nov. 2014.

¹⁴ Strang, H., & Braithwaite, J. (2001). *Restorative justice and civil society*. Cambridge UK: Cambridge University Press.

¹⁵ Cole, Sandi, Ed.D. and Russ Skiba, Ph.D., *PBIS Indiana*, <http://www.indiana.edu/~crpbisin/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/PBISDescription062614.pdf>, Positive Behavior Interventions and Supports Research Center, Indiana University, n.d. Web. 29 Oct. 2015.

When Congress amended the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), lawmakers specifically noted that PBIS positively impacts learning. IDEA states, “Almost 30 years of research and experience has demonstrated that the education of children with disabilities can be made more effective by—providing incentives for whole-school approaches, scientifically based early reading programs, ***positive behavioral interventions and supports*** [emphasis in original].”¹⁶ In fact, in cases where students with disabilities that impede learning are qualified for Individualized Education Programs (IEPs), IDEA requires that the entire team of teachers, parents, and administrators creating the IEP, consider the use of PBIS.¹⁷

In conclusion, the Council recommends addressing discipline issues in ways that protect the integrity of instruction for all students while avoiding decreasing instructional time for the misbehaving student.

¹⁶ 20 U.S. Code § 1400.

¹⁷ *PBIS and the Law*, Positive Behavioral Interventions & Supports, <https://www.pbis.org/school/pbis-and-the-law>, Office of Special Education Programs, U.S. Department of Education, n.d. Web. 29 Oct. 2015.

A Recommendation to Improve Civic Education

Issue:

In the United States, Millennial participation in the civic process in general is noticeably lacking. In 2016, Millennials will be the largest active voting-age demographic in the United States of America, outnumbering the Baby Boomers for the first time.¹⁸ Apathy among Millennial voters is at record levels, not before seen in any previous generations.¹⁹ Legislators, therefore, may be inclined to overlook the interests of young people regarding issues such as student loan debt and healthcare. This is not necessarily as a result of lack of compassion or interest, but more aptly attributed to ignorance of the processes and intricacies of the United States civic process.²⁰ According to Dr. William Galveston of the University of Maryland's School of Public Affairs, civic education is fundamentally essential to ensure a new generation of informed and engaged voters.²¹

Recommendation:

The Council recommends a reform of the education standards to include a more substantial education in the area of government and civics. Some suggested expansions to the standards

¹⁸ Fry, Richard. *Millennials Overtake Baby Boomers as America's Largest Generation*. Pew Research Center RSS. Pew Research Center, 25 Apr. 2016. Web. 11 Nov. 2016.

¹⁹ Dalton, Russell. *Why Don't Millennials Vote?*, Washington Post. The Washington Post, 22 Mar. 2016. Web. 14 Oct. 2016.

²⁰ Black, Eric. *Why Do So Few Citizens Participate in Our Democracy?*, MinnPost. Minnesota Post, 29 Sept. 2014. Web. 14 Oct. 2016.

²¹ Galveston, William A. "Political Knowledge, Political Engagement, and Civic Education." Diss. U of Maryland, 2001. - Annual Review of Political Science, 4(1):217. Annual Review. Web. 14 Oct. 2016.

include, but are not limited to: requiring two credits of government to graduate rather than one, including a standard requiring an examination and understanding of current events and political issues. According to John Patrick of Indiana University:

The scant, superficial civic knowledge of young Americans is related to their generally low levels of political participation and civic engagement, deficiencies in democratic attitudes or dispositions, and underdeveloped democratic citizenship skills. Researchers have found strong relationships between knowledge of democratic principles, processes, and institutions and (1) propensity to vote or otherwise participate in political life, (2) orientation to political tolerance and political interest, and (3) competence in cognitive and participatory skills of democratic citizenship.²²

An increase in education of government and civics is essential to increase voter awareness and activism of young people in the state. Hoosier Millennials are ready to become active and engaged in civic participation, and the Council respectfully urges the General Assembly to consider taking the aforementioned actions.

²² Patrick, J. J. (2002). *Improving Civic Education in Schools*. Bloomington, IN: ERIC Clearinghouse for Social Studies/Social Science Education.